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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 09ATHENS685, VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: A TOP PRIORITY IN U.S.-GREECE BILATERAL

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09ATHENS685**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09ATHENS685</a>	<a href="#">2009-04-29 05:36</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Athens</a>

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.tanea.gr>

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0121  
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0019  
RHMFISS/DHS IP BP WASH DC  
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000685

SIPDIS  
DHS FOR A/S RICHARD BARTH, DR. MARC FREY  
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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SUBJECT: VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: A TOP PRIORITY IN U.S.-GREECE BILATERAL RELATIONS

REF: ATHENS 657

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel Speckhard, Ambassador, State, AmEmbassy Athens;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Greece's entry into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP) is a top priority in U.S.-Greece bilateral relations. As the U.S. and Greece "reset" relations after several difficult years and the advent of a new American Administration, Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis have defined VWP for Greece as a deliverable in the near future. The Greeks, whose low visa-overstay rate has qualified them for years for participation in the VWP, are nationally embarrassed by remaining outside what other "old" EU-15 countries have long enjoyed. They believe the previous U.S. Administration "moved the goalposts" on their application and used delays in VWP to "punish" Greece politically. At the same time, the GOG has been slow to conclude law-enforcement cooperation agreements required by the U.S. Greek cooperation with the U.S. on terrorism and serious crime investigations is excellent, but the government of PM Karamanlis -- which sits on a razor-thin Parliamentary majority (151 of 300 seats) -- has been wary of providing political ammunition to the opposition by publicizing its close cooperation with the U.S. Despite these difficulties, we have completed negotiations on the HSPD-6 agreement of terrorist information sharing, and the VWP MOU is almost finished. The agreement on Preventing and Combating Serious Crime (PCSC) is the last remaining piece of the puzzle. We hope the upcoming negotiations in Washington will bring the PCSC close to completion in preparation for Greece's entry into the VWP mid-summer. END SUMMARY.

GREECE LONG QUALIFIED FOR VWP...

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2. (C) In terms of its visa overstay rate, Greece has qualified for participation in the VWP for years and was provisionally approved for VWP in 1999. But problems with the physical security and lack of biometric features of Greek passports kept Greece out of the 2000 entry of the last of the other "old" EU-15 into the program. Greece subsequently upgraded its passports but then was caught in the freeze on expansion of the VWP following 9/11. Greece was at the top of the VWP list when the U.S. re-engaged on the program, joining the roadmap process in 2005. Secretary Rice formally requested DHS to invite Greece to apply in August 2007. In September 2007, DHS Deputy Secretary Jackson told Greek Ambassador to Washington Mallias that Greece would be the next country into the VWP. In December 2007, the official DHS assessment team visited Athens and positively evaluated Greece for the program.

... BUT DELAYS SLOW PROGRESS

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3. (C) Political and bureaucratic delays, however, slowed Greece's application. Bush Administration frustration with Greece's veto in April 2008 of the NATO application of the Republic of Macedonia over the latter's constitutional name slowed Greece's VWP consideration. Greece was not amongst the six new European countries and South Korea that were invited into the VWP in October 2008, a step that was widely interpreted in Greece as political "punishment."

14. (C) Meanwhile, Greece has had its own delays in signing the HSPD-6 terrorist information sharing agreement (newly required in

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the spring of 2008) and the PCSC on criminal data sharing (newly required in the summer of 2008). GOG cooperation and data sharing with the FBI and other U.S. agencies on terrorist and criminal cases is excellent. But the center-right government of PM Karamanlis, which has a razor-thin Parliamentary majority (151 of 200 seats), has been fearful of providing political ammunition to the opposition by codifying and publicly acknowledging counter-terrorism and law-enforcement cooperation with the U.S. Nevertheless, the U.S. and Greece have completed negotiations on the HSPD-6, while the VWP MOU is almost finished. We believe the May 3-5 negotiations in Washington on the PCSC will bring that final document close to completion as well, paving the way for Greece's entry to the VWP this summer.

NEW ADMINISTRATION, NEW IMPETUS

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15. (C) The new Administration in Washington has signaled its desire to "reset" relations with Greece and has made Greece's entry into the VWP a top priority. In conjunction with increased Greek contributions in Afghanistan, completion of Greece's entry into VWP is the key U.S. deliverable in stage one of the U.S. effort to reshape U.S.-Greece bilateral relations, moving Greece from a reluctant to reliable and proactive partner (reftel).

16. (C) Senior Greek officials all have indicated their willingness to engage seriously, constructively, and expeditiously to complete the remaining negotiations. The Embassy will continue to push to make sure they do their part. Without minimizing the serious issues at stake, we believe that the upcoming PCSC negotiations in Washington provide an opportunity to move forward quickly on the last remaining piece of Greece's VWP puzzle.  
SPECKHARD